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Michael Finnissy

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Unknown Ground

Kritik der Urteilskraft
À propos de Nice

Richard Jackson baritone
New Music Players

metier records division divine art recordings group

métier

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1	Kritik der Urteilskraft	27.56
2	Unknown Ground	25.49
3	À propos de Nice	22.21
Total Duration including pauses		78.22

Richard Jackson baritone (track 2)
New Music Players
artistic director: **Ed Hughes**

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Kritik der Urteilskraft & *À propos de Nice*: Copyright Control

Kritik der Urteilskraft recorded at the University of York on 22 June 2003
Rowland Sutherland (flute), Fiona Cross (clarinet), Mieko Kanno (violin), Michael Atkinson (cello), Richard Casey (piano)

Unknown Ground recorded at Turner Sims Concert Hall, University of Southampton on 29 February 2004
Richard Jackson (baritone), Marcus Barcham-Stevens (violin), Michael Atkinson (cello), Richard Casey (piano)

À propos de Nice recorded at The Steyning Centre, Steyning on 19 December 2004
Marcus Barcham-Stevens (flute), Clare O'Connell (cello), Roderick Chadwick (piano)

Recording engineer/editing and mastering by David Lefeber
Original Sound Recording made by Metier Sound & Vision Ltd

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UNKNOWN GROUND

I
I don't think of death – I know it is going to happen to me –
But I don't live my life as if I'm going to die.
I can't remember the pain and suffering I've been through.
The tremendous loss of self-esteem
brings back certain things from adolescence.
You'll go through patches when you think:
"No-one loves me." or "I'm useless. I don't have any purpose."
People telling me:
"You're dirty. You've done something wrong. You deserve this disease."
Or "You brought it on yourself." Or "You don't deserve treatment - You don't even deserve being listened to."
I feel I've lost my sexuality. I feel I can't go with other men.
I don't know whether I'm denying myself the opportunity.
If I could have a relationship with someone, it would be lovely.
It would be real, positive, constructive, –
a good driving force in my life, – it would create dynamism within me.
I don't know where to go from here - whatever the future is
I don't know.
"I hope I know you for a long time." That's a lovely greeting!

Nick W

II
A patch of blackened earth, smelling of sweat,
can I neither love nor lovingly touch it?
I walk by the bracken-tangled path to the lake,
Past the rough brushwood shelters in the fields,
and the reeds drowsily swaying.
Somewhere in the distance, men are singing.

Sergei Esenin

III
I was afraid of not being able to see the garden grow.
Afraid of having to go to hospital and be pathetic ... like some people are.
Why the fuck, me?
I knew that I wanted to be with guys, but I was never able to manage it ...
When you're repressed, or pent-up for twenty-five years, then you get to a place like New York, you do cut loose ...
I think it's wrong if people start rejecting everything because of AIDS.
If we do that, they have got us where they want us –
the sort of Establishment and Right Wing people.
I don't feel guilty for doing things when I didn't even know that such a virus was around, or it could happen...
and I don't see why anyone should. *Steve R*

IV
Our lives-like oceans filled with voices-flow across each traveller's path.
Pine-trees whispering of darkness and imprisonment,
of the flickering stars barely seen through a barred window,
and of the bell tolling on a fateful journey.
Our love began in the summer – Began with a red coloured egg - meaning desire and blood. –
Soon, time will recede into a grey mist.
Then give me angel wings that I might fly in its wake, unseen ...
That I might travel to unknown ground.

Nicolai Kluyev

V
I come from London. I left home when I was quite young.
I've done lots of different jobs.
I've never been really able to settle into anything.
I've usually been somebody's "bit on the side".
I had to look for security within myself,
to be strong enough to fight the illness.
I'm going to build my castle from within.

Philip X

VI
Trapped in crystal, sunlight splits apart.
Unless we die we cannot be re-born.
In this Twilight's fiery crimson-flooded sky?
Weary from journeying, your face arouses familiar love, familiar pain.
"Here I am. I have no strength. Help me – Stay with me!"
Now every hour filled so carefully: A single day holding forty days.
I visit the town where I was born. Family and friends have gone.
All traces of me have vanished. But the narrow streets, the houses,
The grey-green distant sea, All remind me ...
Remind me of what is unchanging: the dreams and ambitions of youth.
"What do we know? What can we know?"
We know that everything is uncertain. The nothing lasts for ever.

Mikhail Kusmin

VII
I am nearly blind.
Everything is starting to get very dark.
But I cannot give up. I'm a true Leo.
I'm not a loser.
I don't intend for the virus to beat me.
I'll just keep fighting.
I'll just keep fighting.

Brent T

Michael Finnissy - music of ideas, music sensual and violent

Listening to this disc I am really struck by the extraordinary concentration, restraint and spareness of much of the musical rhetoric. There is also an overwhelming sense of cohesion and organicism underlying the features of constantly moving surfaces, and interlocking and unpredictable structural effects. Finnissy confesses to a compositional life of great intuition; but this does not negate the fact that his work consistently displays masterly technical control.

I first met Finnissy in the late 1980s when he was working on two great pieces, the orchestral work *Red Earth* (1987-88) and the opera *The Undivine Comedy* (1985-88). The extent and range of his formidable output was even then bewildering to the young student composer that I was. But even I could immediately recognise a quality of difference in his music, a commitment to finding true expression through alternative or non-canonic voices, the voices of folk musics, for instance, or the voices of dispossessed aboriginal people, and, as is so clearly featured on this disc, the voices of those with AIDS, which at that time was a topic of central concern in this country and which of course globally continues to blight hundreds of thousands of lives.

There is a fundamental sense of social and cultural commitment in Finnissy's work which seems to extend to a particular notion of 'truth to material'. But what is remarkable is the extent to which Finnissy synthesises a whole range of influences and concerns into writing of strength, power and compassion. Such that he formulates a language of explosive originality, while at the same time seems to capture much of the spirit of this socially and culturally complex age.

During the early to mid-1990s Finnissy encouraged me to promote concerts of new music at a professional level which I did largely through the medium of the contemporary music group featured here, the New Music Players. His work was naturally an influence, but so was

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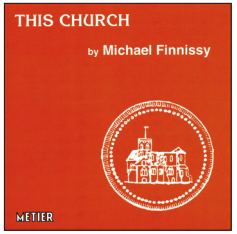
his philosophy and aesthetic outlook - one of rigorous independence and enquiry. So although our programmes were never Finnissy-dominated, those works that were included seem to shine out like beacons, constantly challenging one to think afresh in terms of artistic horizons. I am thinking of the *Cambridge Codex,* an enchanting song-cycle we commissioned in 1991; *Unknown Ground* (1989-90), included here, which we brought to London in 1991, and then returned to over ten years later for further performances and the recording with Richard Jackson; and our more recent commission *Kritik der Urteilskraft.*

This translates as Critique of Judgement, referring to the work of Kant. Written for five of our core players, this work is both abstract and haunting in its uncompromising occupation of musical space. Although Finnissy always resists easy musical references his music is nonetheless replete with musical knowledge and there are times (particularly in the extraordinary opening of this work) when this music of ideas is made utterly sensual and immediate. The music unfolds with falling piano intervals over a clarinet drone, creating a subtly modulating, totally individual kaleidoscopic harmonic landscape. In the first movement, the cello is a persistent and curiously lyrical protagonist. The shifts in tone and pacing of material are sudden and stark, notably in the second movement with its multiple trajectories as the piano drifts free of the other solo instruments.

In *Unknown Ground* the cello again has a leading role in the opening painfully candid and clear episode, in which it counterpoints the singer's text as he clearly articulates the themes of despair and defiance which haunt this powerful multi-textured song-cycle. Again, for all its expressive and elegiac characteristics, this music is also technically brilliantly controlled in its deployment and development of ideas. For example, in the second song the low piano E flat tolls on like a bell underpinning the poetic and anguished call of the singer's call to life against death and oblivion. In the third song, the violence of words 'Why the fuck me' is musically *unemphasised* – resisting the easy option of an expressionistic response in favour of a spare accompaniment to this confession of frustration. But when the text becomes more visionary, ultimately leading towards a kind of visionary optimism, the music immediately responds with music of quivering mobility. Just as the thoughts of the writer in



New Music for a New Oboe
includes Finnissy's
Awâz-e Niyâz played
by the composer with
Christopher Redgate (oboe)
MSV 28529

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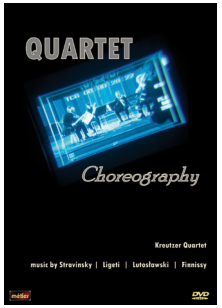
new music for a new oboe | vol.1
the howarth-redgate 21st century oboe
music by michael finnissy & edwin roxburgh
performed by christopher redgate
with michael finnissy
and stephen riddings (piano)

MSVCD 92069
This Church : choral music
Performed by Ixion

Greatest Hits of All Time
Includes Finnissy's work of
that title and *Ceci n'est pas une forme*
played by Christopher Redgate (oboe)
MSV 28513



Quartet Choreography (DVD)
includes Finnissy's Second String Quartet
played by Kreutzer Quartet
MSVDX 101

Decoding Skin
includes Finnissy's *Eadweard Muybridge - Edvard Munch* from *The History of Photography*
in Sound played by Philip Howard
DDA 25021

And:
Ulpirra for solo flute performed by Nancy Ruffer (MSVCD 92063)
Salomé performed by Alison Smart & Katharine Durran (MSVCD 92100)

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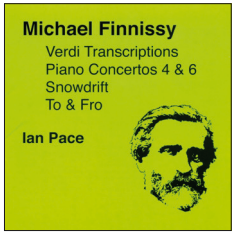
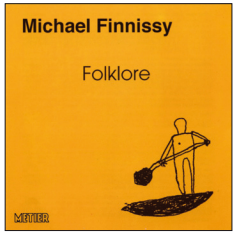


MSVCD 92027
Verdi Transcriptions (2 CD set)
Ian Pace (piano)

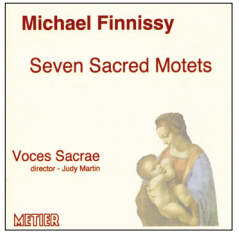


MSVCD 92010
Folklore II and other works
Michael Finnissy (piano)

MSVCD 92011
Music for String Quartet
Kreutzer Quartet

MSVCD 92030
Gershwin Arrangements
Ian Pace (piano)

MSVCD 92023
Seven Sacred Motets
Voces Sacrae



MSVCD 92050
Lost Lands – Chamber Music
Topologies

the final song move from darkness and despair ('I am nearly blind') to brightness and defiance ('I'll just keep fighting') so the music rises with amazing tension, taking fire and illuminating the breathtaking and decisive rise in the human spirit, the decision to go on with life and not to quit.

The final work on this CD, *A propos de Nice* for piano trio, is a very unconventional scoring of a silent film (of the same title by Jean Vigo from 1930) which also enjoys a life in the concert hall apart from the 'accompanimental' context of screenings. Nevertheless it is an intriguing experiment in finding musical forms and gestures which are analogous to the cutting and editing of film without being centred on the merely equivalent. Thus the music seems at first to be a manic interfolding of textures and quotations which break off and resume, perhaps a latter-day equivalent of *Petrouchka*. However there is no naive narrative impulse to this music. It is 'critical' in the best sense of the avant-garde. As one listens to it one becomes aware of a curious neutrality of utterance - a kind of holding on to its cards - which we found in performance with the film served to bring out all the more the shocking nature of the images of poverty in the backstreets of Cannes which are juxtaposed with images of the rich as they desport themselves on their boats in the marina.

The impact of this vertical montage of critical picture and music is far greater than it would be with music of conventional affective empathy. Throughout this piece the echoes of a bygone culture cast long silvery shadows which are transformed, darkened and lengthened in Finnissy's music of ideas, which flickers and pulsates with sudden bursts of energy. This is music of ideas made by a composer with both social commitment and total technical command and a range from the violent to the tender and compassionate. This is music which ultimately moves toward the metaphysical and defies categorisation.

Notes* © 2005 *Ed Hughes

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The Performers

Richard Jackson was born in Cornwall, and educated at King's College, Cambridge and the Guildhall School.

His specialisms as a singer included contemporary music, and the artsong repertoire. He was a founder-member of The Songmakers' Almanac. He sang at ENO, Opera North, Glyndebourne, and the Monnaie, Brussels.

He sang in many opera premieres at Almeida Opera. He sang new music concerts in Europe and America. He has collaborated with Rihm, Finnissy, Oliver, Ferneyhough, Eötvös, Dusapin and Weir.

Having retired as a singer he has now embarked on a flourishing teaching career, at the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School. He has taught in Australia and China. He has served twice on the panel of the Kathleen Ferrier Awards.

New Music Players was founded by Ed Hughes in 1990. Early projects included commissions from Michael Finnissy and Howard Skempton, and the first UK performance of John Cage's *Europera 5*. The ensemble appeared at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, the Brighton Festival, ICA, Purcell Room and in many other festivals and venues during the 1990s. In the 2000s NMP held residencies at York, Bristol and Nottingham Universities and broadcast regularly on BBC Radio 3.

The ensemble features some of the UK's finest musicians, and draws inspiration from the range and versatility of their collective experience. Core players are also members of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Opera House, Manchester Camerata, the English Chamber Orchestra, Psappha, *notes inégales* and others extending to period instrument performance, jazz and improvisation.

The ensemble developed major touring projects in 2005 and 2007, the latter funded by Arts Council England. These featured Ed Hughes's scores for Eisenstein's silent films *Battleship Potemkin* and *Strike,* which were taken to venues ranging from the Hove Engineerium to the Atrium of the British Library. In 2010 a concert for the Out Hear series at Kings Place explored music and photography with several film and musical premieres.

New Music Players recorded five of its commissions (Ed Hughes, James Wood, Gordon McPherson, Rowland Sutherland, Rolf Hind) for the London Independent Records label in 2003. A CD of works by Japanese composer Jo Kondo appeared in 1996 on the Japanese ALM records label. NMP recorded Ed Hughes's scores for Eisenstein's films *Battleship Potemkin* and *Strike* on a DVD box set released by Tartan Video in 2007. Ozu's 1932 film *I was born but…* with a score by Ed Hughes was released by the BFI in a new recording by NMP in January 2011. In 2012 the ensemble's recording of chamber, piano and choral music by Ed Hughes ("Dark Formations") was released by Metier Records to critical acclaim. In October 2012 NMP premièred Ed Hughes's opera "When the Flame Dies" at the Canterbury Festival.
NMP website: **www.newmusicplayers.org.uk**
New Music Players is managed by Liz Webb Management **www.lizwebb.org.uk**

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